

MINUTES

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TASK FORCE

Tuesday April 1, 2008

2:00 PM

Council Chambers

Municipal Building

93 Cottage Street

Bar Harbor, Maine

- I. Call to Order by the Planning Director Anne Krieg at 2:10 PM
- II. Introductions

Members present: Patricia Samuel of the Graycote Inn representing the Bar Harbor Bed & Breakfast Association; David Towle from the MDI Biological Laboratory; Barry Teater from the Jackson Laboratory; James Houghton; Chris Vincenti of Reel Pizza; John Kelly, Acadia National Park Planner

Also present was Chris Fogg, CEO of the Chamber of Commerce and Francine Carrarro, Executive Director of the Abbe Museum
- III. Review of Task Force bylaws

There were no questions or concerns raised.
- IV. Review of Economic Development portions of the Comprehensive Plan

There was a discussion on home occupations and the arts industry. Coordination with the Cruise Ship Study Task Force was raised as a concern. A request was made to add the Conservation Commission as a resource group.
- V. Review of Pending Economic Development Projects

Anne Krieg reviewed some projects for this task force to work on: a wayfinding signage plan for the downtown area, the preparation of the economic development plan, and continuing research into an economic development district.
- VI. Election of Officers

John Kelly Nominated Patricia Samuel as Vice – Chair. All were in favor of the nomination.

David Towle nominated Barry Teater as the Secretary. All were in favor of the nomination.

No nominations were made for Chair. The group will consider this at their next meeting as new members are appointed.
- VII. Public Comment

Patricia Samuel chaired the remainder of the meeting.

The Task Force utilized this agenda item to allow for general comments about the economic climate in Bar Harbor.

David Towle and Barry Teater raised issues with providing housing for their employees.

Chris Fogg indicated a good place for public investment is in sidewalks and streetscapes.

Chris Vincenti and James (Howdy) Houghton started a general discussion on the importance of working together, being communicative and seeking common goals as a group. The essence of this task force is serving local needs.

One topic about which the task force wanted more information is an understanding of who and what makes up our year-round community.

John Kelly also discussed housing issues that the Park has with their seasonal worker population. He also agreed we need to coordinate our wayfinding approach around the town. He talked about Park visitation and the Park Visitor Use Management Plan. He said this Plan is not to limit people using the Park nor discourage visitation but rather to encourage people to use other methods as the Island Explorer to get into the Park as well as methods to manage how people use the Park. He also posed the questions of whether visitors come here for Bar Harbor or the Park or if this matters. The relationship between the Park and the Town is crucial and important to the future of the area. He also noted that discussions of more year-round usage of the area may be difficult for the park because their staffing is seasonal.

Patricia Samuel expressed concern that a year-round community may bring more formula-based businesses to Bar Harbor; right now, the seasonality of the area keeps them away.

Chris Vincenty indicated that the area will always be seasonal as the winter weather is too unpredictable for winter activities. He noted that that a viable year-round community means one that is viable for the population that lives here, not necessarily for increased visitation. He said we need to match the business climate with the community population. He discussed issues of supporting anchors and destination businesses in the downtown and doing more to connect the island-wide year-round population. He feels the Town's codes are too protectionist, not allowing for more street festivals and outdoor activities. He noted that the season is short to make the funds to support the business and land valuations, thus taxes, are very high. He also observed the changes in families coming here from the comments he has received from patrons. The comments indicated that many are priced out, there are not enough activities for the kids, there are no evening activities for families, and that restaurant prices are very high.

John Kelly noted that the Park is also looking into engaging youth in Park programs and activities as they too are concerned with the decrease in family visitation.

Francine Carrarro indicated that if the year round population is only working here and not otherwise participating here, then we don't have a year-round community.

Patricia Samuel added that the rents are also high for start-up companies, artists and

shopkeepers. She said the community used to foster business start-ups. She told the task force about the loan program in Rockland.

Data on the number of hotel rooms was requested as well as on weekly rentals. An ownership map of downtown and town hill was also requested, as well as any available information on rental units.

It was noted that both Chris Spruce of Island Housing Trust and Terry Kelly of MDI Housing Authority should be informed of meetings and that the task force might ask them to come and speak to affordable housing issues.

John Kelly asked to be copied on Cruise Ship Task Force minutes in order to keep up to date on their work and for coordination.

The group thought it might be helpful to speak to other comparable towns about their economic development policies within their Town as well as other marketing ideas and business practices.

Anne Krieg talked about her role as an officer of the American Planning Association's Resort and Tourism Division and she would continually seek information from comparable towns on these issues. Chris Vincenti expressed concern that some of the information sent thus far is for towns bigger and not comparable to Bar Harbor.

The task force discussed the fact that businesses are not tied together in districts: identified districts tend to get attention. They also agreed that the resident population, the business community and town government need to work together and coordinate efforts. Communication among community groups and others who offer events to residents needs to be strengthened.

The task force discussed ideas for more sporting events such as bicycle races and kayak races.

VIII. Matters for Next Meeting

Signage and destination business ideas will be discussed next time. John Kelly will also discuss Park visitor management policies and plans.

IX. Set Date/Time/Location for Next Meeting

The task force decided to meet beyond the monthly requirement and meet every two weeks until summer. The next meeting is set for April 15, 2008 at 2:00 PM.

X. Adjournment at 3:30